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SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
3rd meeting
held on
Monday, 6 October 1997
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAPURANGA [redacted] (Zimbabwe)

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[redacted]

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (continued)

1. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) nominated Ms. Resch (Finland) for the office of Rapporteur.

2. Ms. Resch (Finland) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

3. The CHAIRMAN, on behalf of the Committee, expressed heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic in connection with the death in August 1997 of Mr. Al-Attar, the former Rapporteur of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

4. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco), speaking on a point of order, asked the Chairman to inform the Committee of the results of the consultations he had conducted on the question of Western Sahara.

5. The CHAIRMAN said that he would provide the information to the Committee at a later stage.

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (A/52/23 (Parts II, V and VI); A/AC.109/2071-2072, 2074-2078, 2080-2082, 2084, 2086-2088, 2090)

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AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (A/52/3* (chap. V, sect. E))

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* To be issued.

AGENDA ITEM 93: OFFERS BY MEMBER STATES OF STUDY AND TRAINING FACILITIES FOR INHABITANTS OF NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES (A/52/388)

6. Mr. MEKDAD (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Special Committee, introduced the chapters of the report of the Special Committee covering its work during 1997 under agenda items 18, 90, 91 and 92, contained in document A/52/23 (Parts II-VII).

7. The recommendations and proposals adopted by the Special Committee in implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/146 of 13 December 1996 were contained in document A/52/23, Parts V to VII, chapters IX to XI. It was the responsibility of the administering Powers to create conditions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories to enable their people to exercise freely their right to self-determination. In that connection, the administering Powers, in cooperation with the Governments of the Territories, must facilitate programmes of political education in the Territories, promote their economic and social development, help to preserve their cultural identity and give priority to the strengthening and diversification of their economies.

8. It was necessary for the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system to respond more positively to the request contained in the letters sent to them for submission of information about Non-Self-Governing Territories, in particular information about natural disasters, the problems of drug trafficking and other illegal activities, the exploitation of the marine resources of the Territories, and other aspects of their socio-economic development. One effective means of ascertaining the situation in small island Territories was to send visiting missions. In that connection the administering Powers and the representatives of the peoples of the Territories must assist the Special Committee by inviting visiting missions of the United Nations.

9. The Special Committee was very pleased with the cooperation extended to it by two administering Powers - New Zealand and Portugal. The informal consultations begun with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America had resulted in an agreement on the resolution on small island Territories, and the Special Committee hoped that such cooperation would be strengthened. An agreement had also been reached with the European Union on the resolution on foreign economic interests. For its part, the Special Committee was ready to enhance its dialogue with the administering Powers in a spirit of constructive cooperation. If the Secretariat was to be able to prepare timely working papers accurately depicting the conditions in the Territories concerned, it was essential for the administering Powers to transmit or continue to transmit to the Secretary-General the information called for in Article 73 e of the Charter, as well as the fullest possible information on the political and constitutional developments in the Territories in question within a maximum period of six months following the end of the administrative year in those Territories. Suitable information must be drawn from all available published sources.

10. One important result of the consultations between the Special Committee and the European Union on agenda item 91 was the improvement of the text of the corresponding resolution, which had enabled the General Assembly to adopt it by consensus. The Special Committee was ready to cooperate further with the

European Union and other interested Member States in the search for new approaches to the item on military activities and arrangements by colonial Powers in Territories under their administration. The chapters of the report of the Special Committee on its activities in 1991 relating to agenda items 91 and 92 were contained in chapters V to VII of document A/52/23 (Parts III and IV).

11. The Special Committee had dedicated considerable attention to the decision of the Secretary-General to transfer the decolonization team from the Department of Political Affairs to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. After careful consideration of the matter the Special Committee had adopted by consensus a resolution entitled "Decolonization Programme in the United Nations system" (A/AC.109/2094). In the resolution the Special Committee had reaffirmed the political nature of its mandate and had urged the Secretary-General to maintain the Decolonization Branch with all its functions in the Department of Political Affairs. The Special Committee called upon the members of the Fourth Committee to endorse the resolution and thus strengthen the political nature of the Special Committee's mandate.

12. Mr. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea), Chairman of the Special Committee, said that in the light of the specific conditions of each of the Territories concerned the Special Committee continued to maintain close contacts with the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and continued to hear views and receive information about those Territories. In that connection the Special Committee had held its annual regional seminar in Antigua and Barbuda, providing an important forum for the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, regional organizations, Member States and non-governmental organizations, as well as enabling the Special Committee to learn about the genuine wishes of the peoples of the Territories.

13. In view of the critical financial situation of the United Nations and the concern to enhance the effectiveness of working methods, the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance had been integrated with the Special Committee. The open-ended Bureau of the Special Committee had also taken upon itself responsibility for the functions formally performed by the Working Group. That responsible decision of the Special Committee allowed it to utilize the resources of the United Nations more efficiently, eliminate any duplication and streamline its work.

14. While carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly and strictly adhering to the fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Special Committee had taken due account of the changing geopolitical climate and had engaged in consultations with the administering Powers and with the European Union. Those efforts had brought positive results. On 14 March 1997 the General Assembly had adopted by consensus a resolution on small Territories. An understanding had been reached with the European Union on the question of foreign economic interests, and a new version of the draft resolution had been worked out. The Special Committee was ready for further cooperation and expressed its conviction that all the administering Powers would cooperate with it in order to assist it to discharge its mandate in full.

15. With regard to the administrative decisions leading to the transfer of the decolonization unit from the Department of Political Affairs to the newly

established Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, he said that the move had serious implications for the work of the Committee and consequently undermined the status of the United Nations decolonization programme; it might have practically eliminated the political essence of the agenda on decolonization within the United Nations. The United Nations decolonization programme was undoubtedly now in jeopardy. It was a most serious matter requiring urgent consideration. He had drawn the attention of the Secretary-General to the matter on behalf of the Special Committee and had requested him to consider the issue and to take the necessary action to maintain the status of the United Nations decolonization programme, as mandated by the General Assembly.

16. The concerns of the Special Committee had been reiterated in many forums. At the regular session of the Special Committee, 12 members of the Special Committee, together with Portugal in its capacity as an administering Power, had sponsored a resolution entitled "Decolonization programme in the United Nations system", in which the Secretary-General was urged to maintain the Decolonization Branch, with all its current functions, in the Department of Political Affairs. That resolution had been adopted by consensus and was included in the report as a recommendation of the Special Committee to the General Assembly.

17. He emphasized that the goal of the Special Committee was very clear: it was to protect and safeguard the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, in accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. In that regard, it was gratifying to note that its position of principle on the issue was supported by many Member States from all regional groups. He hoped that the Special Committee would succeed in preserving its political mandate and in continuing to play an effective role in support of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in their evolution towards self-determination in accordance with their political aspirations.

18. His delegation fully supported the positive initiatives of the Secretary-General and the great efforts he was making to reform the Organization. In his reply to the letters sent on behalf of the Committee, the Secretary-General had clearly indicated his support for and commitment to the important work of the Committee in monitoring the implementation of the United Nations decolonization programme.

19. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee of the results of his consultations on the question of Western Sahara with the Permanent Representatives of Morocco and Algeria. A series of meetings during the current year, mediated by Mr. James A. Baker III, had led to considerable progress in the negotiating process. The Committee should take note of that. The two sides had not, however, reached any agreement on whether the Committee's discussions should conclude with the adoption of a resolution or of a statement by the Chairman. Neither side had, however, objected to the question of Western Sahara being discussed by the Committee. It was cause for satisfaction that the Permanent Representatives of the two countries had met and intended to continue their consultations with a view to further discussion of the question.

20. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said it was well known that his delegation had suggested that the question of Western Sahara should not be discussed at the

current session of the General Assembly in case the results of the discussion had an adverse effect on the settlement process. If the matter was to be considered, however, it was essential that an attempt should be made to reach agreement on the outcome of the discussion.

21. As the Secretary-General had stated in his report (S/1997/742), all the conditions for the implementation of the settlement plans were in place. All the issues relating to it had been resolved and there were no further matters for discussion. All that remained was to ensure that the progress that had been achieved was not jeopardized. His delegation regretted that it was the intention to pursue the discussion and only hoped that its results would not have a negative effect on the settlement process.

22. The CHAIRMAN noted that the Permanent Representative of Morocco had not objected to the continuation of the discussion on the question. He had only emphasized that the members of the Committee should note the considerable progress achieved during the course of the meetings, and that that progress should be reflected in a statement rather than a resolution.

23. Mr. KATTI (Algeria) wondered how a discussion in the Committee could have an adverse effect on the implementation of the agreements between Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO. His delegation believed that the Committee could in no way affect the progress which had been achieved during the meetings and that a discussion could have only beneficial consequences. The consensus reached during the year would enable the Committee to draft a resolution expressing support for the efforts made by all parties. His delegation was prepared, as before, to submit a draft resolution.

24. The CHAIRMAN urged the delegations of Algeria and Morocco to continue their consultations regarding the possible outcome of the discussion. With regard to the question of support for the resolution of the Special Committee calling for the retention of the Decolonization Branch within the Department of Political Affairs, he suggested that discussion should be deferred until the Committee considered the draft resolution relating to the issue.

25. It was so decided.

26. Mr. BUNE (Fiji), noting that his delegation had always supported the work of the United Nations in the area of decolonization, said that the success of that process could be measured by the large number of colonial Territories that had gained independence since the adoption in 1960 of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as a result of which 185 States were now Members of the United Nations. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee had played a decisive role in that remarkable achievement and it should continue to pursue its mandate vigorously to ensure that the status and future of the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories were determined by the year 2000.

27. If the objectives of the International Decade to Eradicate Colonialism were to be achieved by the year 2000, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee and, in particular, the Special Committee would need to review

urgently the question of their working methods and devise new approaches to the discharge of their mandates.

28. After analysing General Assembly resolutions 742 (VIII) of 27 November 1953 and 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, his delegation had come to the conclusion that the factors which had been used to determine whether a given Territory had achieved a full measure of self-government should not be a hindrance to the attainment of that goal; the situation in each Non-Self-Governing Territory was unique; and there were various degrees of self-government, including free association with another State. Those positions had been supported by the Legal Counsel in February 1997.

29. In the implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), it was imperative that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee and the Special Committee should work in collaboration with the administering Powers. One example of such interaction was the successful cooperation with New Zealand. Despite the willingness of the administering Powers to continue an informal dialogue with the Special Committee, it was still not enough and it was to be hoped that they would cooperate fully with the Special Committee. In that connection, his delegation would like to urge the administering Powers to take their places formally in the Special Committee so that they could work together towards the speedy determination of the future status of the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories. As Members of the United Nations, the administering Powers, which were also permanent members of the Security Council, had an obligation to work with the Committee in order to reach a resolution of the issue.

30. Regional seminars had become the only, although not the most effective, means of ascertaining the views and wishes of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories following the withdrawal of formal cooperation by the administering Powers, but the value of those seminars had been questioned by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in the light of the current financial crisis. Accordingly, his delegation believed that the resumption of the work of visiting missions would represent a step forward in the Committee's discharge of its mandate. That step, however, should be taken at the appropriate time. His delegation further believed that the free and voluntary choice by the population of the Non-Self-Governing Territories should be made on the basis of a referendum or plebiscite in each Territory under the supervision of a visiting mission.

31. In conclusion, he expressed disappointment over the proposal in the reform programme submitted by the Secretary-General concerning the transfer of the decolonization unit to the new Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. His delegation believed that it was inappropriate to make that transfer at the current stage when the Committee's mandate was to expire in three years' time, in the year 2000, since it might appear to be an attempt to minimalize the significance of the Special Committee's work. His delegation therefore urged that the status quo should be retained until the year 2000, after which the question could be taken up again and reviewed.

32. Mr. GUANI (Uruguay) said that his country, which had demonstrated its firm commitment to the self-determination of peoples, had noted with concern the

slowing down of the work of the decolonization unit. The Special Committee should see to it that measures were taken to help to safeguard the rights of the 17 Territories which had not yet attained self-determination so that they would be able to improve their living conditions.

33. He welcomed the progress achieved by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Mr. James A. Baker III, in ensuring that a referendum on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara would be held the following year. His delegation was convinced that direct talks leading to the implementation of an agreement could help to reinforce that progress, which afforded grounds for optimism. Such an agreement had already been worked out in Houston, Texas.

34. His delegation was also convinced that efforts were being made by the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland aimed at bringing the sides closer together in order to resolve the problem of the sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands. It was to be hoped that direct talks between Buenos Aires and London, which had indeed demonstrated a willingness to cooperate on other aspects of the problem, would make it possible to achieve the desired positive results.

35. In conclusion, he noted the significant contribution which visiting missions made in ensuring effective cooperation between the administering Powers and the United Nations.

36. Mr. STANISLAUS (Grenada), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that of the many remarkable contributions made by the United Nations in the social, economic, cultural and geopolitical spheres since the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the Organization's successes in the field of decolonization were the most impressive, for they had changed the political landscape of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the whole world forever. The unstoppable progress towards decolonization, including the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, would be forever recorded in the annals of the United Nations. However, the work of the Special Committee on decolonization was not yet complete.

37. He commended the administering Powers for facilitating the process of decolonization and called on them to continue to work with the Special Committee until those among the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories that so desired were afforded every opportunity and the necessary assistance to exercise their right to self-determination freely in order to obtain full independence or any other change in their status.

38. His delegation considered that General Assembly resolution 51/224 A of 27 March 1997, on the Non-Self-Governing Territories of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, correctly and adequately reaffirmed that United Nations visiting missions to the Territories at an appropriate time and in consultation with the administering Powers were an effective means of ascertaining the situation in the Territories and requested the administering Powers and elected representatives of the peoples of the Territories to assist the Special Committee in that regard. The CARICOM countries were concerned that

in some quarters the notion persisted that the Special Committee was anachronistic. In its resolutions 46/181 of 19 December 1991 and 51/146 of 13 December 1996 the General Assembly had noted that the Special Committee still had work to do to bring about the total eradication of colonialism by the year 2000.

39. In the light of the foregoing, CARICOM failed to understand the rationale for transferring the secretariat of the Special Committee from the Department of Political Affairs, where it had worked so well for so many years, to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, when by the nature of its tasks the Special Committee was a political organ. However, his delegation was heartened by the expressed readiness of the United States of America and the United Kingdom to reconsider the matter, which appeared to be a stumbling block to the development of their otherwise friendly relations with CARICOM.

40. Turning to the question of assistance to Montserrat, he expressed appreciation to the United Kingdom, as the administering Power, and the CARICOM countries, especially Antigua and Barbuda, for making every effort to provide the necessary assistance. Much still needed to be done, however, to meet the emergency needs of the people of Montserrat. In addition, a special fund should be set up to provide assistance in such emergencies brought about by natural disasters in the Caribbean region.

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS

41. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had received a series of communications containing requests for hearings. The seven requests contained in documents A/C.4/52/2 and Add.1-5 concerned Guam. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to grant those requests.

42. It was so decided.

43. The CHAIRMAN said that the request contained in document A/C.4/52/4 concerned Western Sahara. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to grant that request.

44. It was so decided.

45. The CHAIRMAN said that he had also received five communications containing requests for hearings on decolonization items relating to Guam, Western Sahara and the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. In accordance with the usual practice, he suggested that those communications should be circulated as Committee documents and considered at the next meeting.

46. It was so decided.

47. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) sought clarification as to who had submitted the requests for hearings.

48. The CHAIRMAN read out the list of individuals from whom requests for hearings had been received.

49. Ms. SMITH (United Kingdom), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, recalled that her Government's position with regard to the question of the Falkland Islands had been expressed by the representative of the United Kingdom in a statement delivered at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly on 25 September 1997.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.